

Curriculum Style Guide



California
Department of Child Support Services



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Introduction

This is a guide for writing clear curriculum materials. The Statewide Training Section developed it to help you prepare training materials that meet the department's standards for professionalism, uniformity, readability and ease of use. It applies to all course materials such as announcements, trainer and participant guides, Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, handouts and desk aids.

We based this guide on the principles of plain language. You can find more information on these principles at:

<http://www.plainlanguage.gov>.

We also recommend, *Plain Language: A Handbook for Writers in the U.S. Federal Government*, by Richard Lauchman. We are indebted to Mr. Lauchman for allowing us to use the handbook as one of our primary references. The complete handbook is available on-line at:

<http://www.mindspring.com/~rlauchman/PDFfiles/PLHandbook.PDF>.

We would also like to acknowledge the valuable assistance of John Stryloski of the Plain Language Action and Information Network.

Remember, this is a guide that highlights some of the conventions of clear writing. For more detailed guidance we recommend the National Archives and Records Administration's, *Drafting Legal Documents: Principles of Clear Writing*, which can be found at:

http://www.archives.gov/federal_register/document_drafting_handbook/document_drafting_handbook.html.

We encourage you to continue striving to communicate clearly in all your training materials, from course announcements to evaluations.

Word Processing Software



Use Microsoft Word as your word processing software when developing statewide curriculum and materials

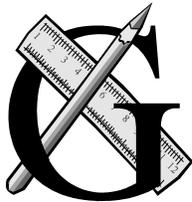
A
a

Fonts to Use

- Times New Roman, 24-point, for section headings
- Arial, 16-point, bold, for subheadings
- Arial, 12-point, bold, for paragraph headings
- Times New Roman, 12-point, for general text
- Avoid writing in ALL CAPS

Use **boldface** or *italics* to highlight an especially important word, phrase, or sentence.

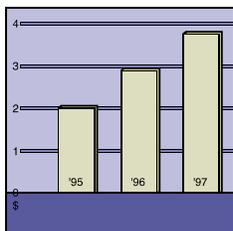
Formatting



- **Write text in block style.**
Do not indent the beginning of a paragraph. Skip a line to indicate that you are starting a new paragraph.
- **Keep line 60 to 64 characters in length**
- **Insert two spaces after a period.**
- **Leave the right margin ragged.**
Readability research strongly indicates that most people read more quickly and with better comprehension when the right margins are ragged, as opposed to justified.
- **Leave plenty of white space.**
Readers want visual reassurance that information has been organized into easily readable chunks, and they also want to see that there are frequent “resting places” – opportunities to synthesize one idea before going on to the next. White space provides both. It also provides readers with a place to write notes.
- **Use a footer to place the document title and page number at the bottom of each page.**
- **Put lengthy but subordinate material such as text of legislation in an appendix.**
- **Hyperlink’s Screen tip**
Always separate a hyperlink from the body of a sentence by double spacing. See page 1, Introduction, for examples.

Using Graphics

Graphics, charts, and graphs can illuminate information more clearly and quickly than text.



- **Keep the design simple.**
- **Integrate text with graphics.**
- **Use tables to make complex material easier to understand.**
Put complex provisions into tables to save words and make relationships clearer.
- **If material is particularly complex and many conditional situations are involved, put it in an “if-then” table.**
See example of an “if-then” table in Appendix 1.

Use Bulleted Lists

It is easier to grasp ideas when they are presented vertically.

- **Use numbers** when (1) the items in your list are presented in order of priority or (2) you wish to reinforce the idea of how many items there are.
- **Use either numbers or letters** (a., b., c., etc.) when the items in your list must be done as steps in a process or any other sequence.
- **Use bullets** if you are not listing items in order of importance or as steps in a sequence. Use the same style bullet throughout your document.

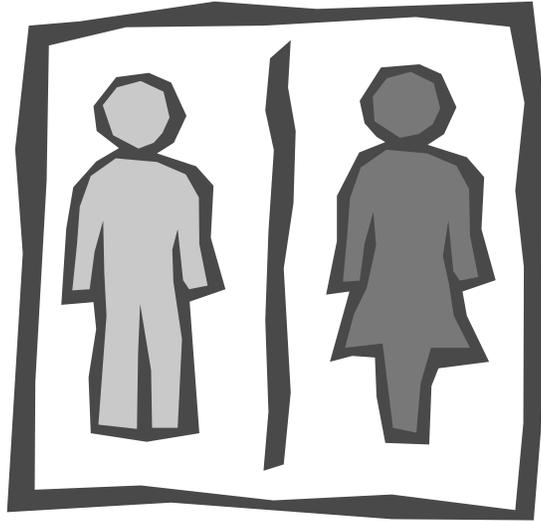
Terminology

CSPPO

EAR

PAPDU

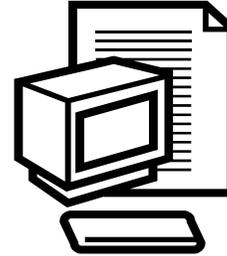
- **Use official California Department of Child Support Services terminology, abbreviations, and acronyms.**
DCSS will soon be releasing an official glossary of child support terminology.
- **Define each abbreviation or acronym the first time you use it.**
But do not abbreviate terms that you use only once or a few times. Write them out each time.
- **Avoid using abbreviations or acronyms in a title or heading.**
- **Avoid overusing abbreviations and acronyms.**
The overuse of acronyms can confuse, distract, or frustrate the reader. Example: *According to DHS officials, the OSHPD's ARD reported that it has denied both CON and COE applications this month.*
- **Use the same term consistently to identify a specific thought or object.**
For example, if you use the term “senior citizens” to refer to a group, continue to use this term throughout your document. Do not substitute another term, such as the “elderly,” which may cause the reader to wonder if you are referring to the same group.
- **Capitalize “state”**
 - At the beginning of a sentence
 - When it is part of a title
State and Consumer Services Agency
 - When you are referring to California
Currently, the State is considering the expansion of mass transit opportunities.
- **Capitalize “federal” when it meets the first three criteria for capitalizing state.**



Use Gender Neutral Language

Some ways of avoiding using *his* or *her*:

- **Cut “his” from the sentence.**
Each security officer must use ~~his~~ discretion.
Every writer must use ~~his~~-good judgment.
The applicant must be prepared to spend ~~his~~ weekends traveling.
- **Use “you.”**
You must bring your driver’s license or other identification.
- **Make the first term plural, and then use “their.”**
All researchers must bring their driver’s license or other photo identification.
- **Use an article (“a,” “an,” or “the”).**
Each researcher must bring a driver’s license.
- **Write a passive construction.**
A driver’s license or other photo identification is required.



Writing the Content

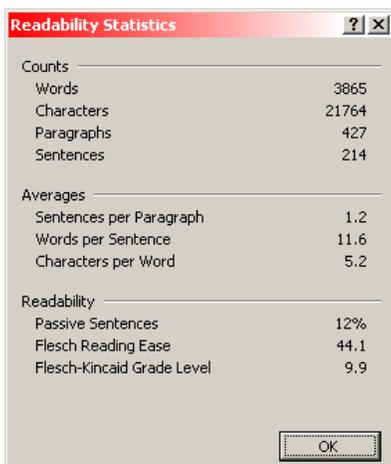
- **Use informative headings.**
Develop your headings carefully. They are one of the most useful tools you can use in developing an appealing, understandable document.
- **Use short sentences.**
Shorter sentences are better for conveying complex information; they break the information up into smaller, easier-to-process units.
- **Express only one idea in each sentence.**
- **Vary your sentence structure.**
Vary your sentence structure to avoid chopiness, but don't revert to tangled multi-clause sentences.
- **Cover one topic in each paragraph.**
Limiting each paragraph to one topic gives the document a clean appearance and makes it easier to read and understand.
- **Keep your paragraphs relatively short.**
If a paragraph is a long one, provide transitional terms in at least a few places. Start sentences with such words and phrases as *Next*, *Furthermore*, *In addition*, or *As a result*.

Readability Level

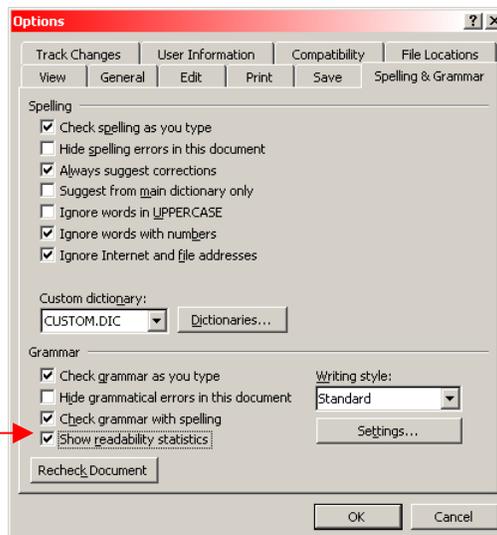
- Write curriculum materials at an 8th grade readability level.

Determining readability:

- Use the spell check function on Microsoft Word.
 - Click on “Tools” on the toolbar.
 - Click on “Options.”
 - Click on the “Spelling and Grammar” tab.
 - Click on “Check grammar with spelling” box.
 - Click on “Show readability statistics” box.



Readability Statistics	
Counts	
Words	3865
Characters	21764
Paragraphs	427
Sentences	214
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.2
Words per Sentence	11.6
Characters per Word	5.2
Readability	
Passive Sentences	12%
Flesch Reading Ease	44.1
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	9.9



- Click on “Spelling and Grammar” toolbar icon  or press F7 to begin the spell check function. Microsoft Word will check spelling and grammar and then display information about the reading level of the document, including readability scores. The readability score is based on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence.



Use the Active Voice

Eliminate ambiguity about responsibilities

The active voice makes it clear who is supposed to do what.

In sentences written in active voice, the subject **performs** the action expressed in the verb; the **subject acts**.

- The **dog** (subject) **bit** (action) the boy.
- **Jan** (subject) **will present** (action) her research at the conference.
- **Scientists** (subject) **have performed** (action) experiments to test the theory.

Don't write, "*It must be done.*" Write instead: "*You [or someone else] must do it.*"

Passive Voice

In sentences written in passive voice, the subject **receives** the action expressed in the verb; the subject is acted upon. The agent performing the action may appear in a "by the..." phrase or may be omitted.

- The **boy** (subject) **was bitten** (action) by the dog.
- **Research** (subject) **will be presented** (action) by Jan at the conference.
- **Experiments** (subject) **have been conducted** (action) to test the theory.

Avoid Using Shall

Besides being obsolete, *shall* is imprecise. It can indicate either an obligation or a prediction.



- **To state legal obligations, use “must.”**
State regulations mandate that LCSAs must (not “shall”) keep client case files confidential.
- **For permission, use “may.”**
Materials may (not “shall”) be used only in the research room.
- **When recommending a course of action, use “should.”**
You and your financial institution should (not “shall”) agree on how the account will be handled.
- **When indicating the future, use “will.”**
Our facility will (not “shall”) reopen on September 1.
- **When something is fact, use “is.”**
The contracting officer is (not “shall be”) responsible for ensuring that the terms comply with the Federal Acquisition Regulations.

A Few PowerPoint Tips



Focus On:

- Readability
- Balance
- Simplicity
- Consistency
- Relevance

Make your text large:

- Titles should be around **36-40** point or more.
- Body copy should be about **24** point or more.

Use your slides to visually punctuate your message:

- Use statements instead of sentences.
- Use key words to help audience focus on your message.

Text slides should be brief:

- No more than eight words per line.
- No more than eight lines per slide.

Use art wisely:

- Art should enhance and clarify your message.
- Use audio and animation sparingly.
- Choose a style and use it consistently.

Curriculum Manuals and Guides

When developing curriculum manuals and guides (e.g. participant resource guide, trainer guide, etc.), make these the first four pages:



- **Title Page**
Place on the title page the department name and seal, curriculum title (centered vertically and horizontally) and publication or revision date.
- **Acknowledgements**
- **Director's Message**
Insert a placeholder for the Director's message. The Statewide Training Section will provide the Director's message when the curriculum is certified.
- **Table of Contents**
Use any format you choose as long as you list the sections, subsections, and their page numbers.

Trainer Guide

The trainer guide is your cookbook. It provides detailed instructions on what to do, how to do it, and when it should be done. It is an important component of standardized training and is required for all DCSS certified courses. Incorporate the following into your training guide:

- **List of tools and equipment needed to conduct the training.**
- **PowerPoint and multi-media prompts.**
If the training calls for the use of PowerPoint or multi-media, include prompts indicating when and how it is to be used.
- **Copies of handouts and prompts for distributing them.**
- **Instructions and prompts for group interaction activities and exercises.**
- **Sample transitional statements to lead the trainer from one component to the next.**
See the sample trainer guide in Appendix 2.

List of Contributors

Place a list of contributors on the last page. List in alphabetical order the people who helped develop your curriculum. Include their title, organizational unit and department.

See the sample List of Contributors in Appendix 3.

Appendix 1

Sample If – Then Table

Developed by the training staff of the
New York State Division of Child Support Enforcement

Notice requirements in UIFSA

WHEN THIS HAPPENS	THIS ENTITY	SENDS THIS MATERIAL	IN THIS TIME FRAME	TO THIS ENTITY (OR ENTITIES)	UIFSA CITATION
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Pertaining to Support Enforcement Agency Responsibilities

a support enforcement agency receives a written notice from an initiating tribunal	the support enforcement agency	a copy of the notice that was received	within [2] days (not counting weekends and legal holidays) of receiving the notice	the petitioner	307(b)(4)
a support enforcement agency receives a written notice from a responding tribunal	the support enforcement agency	a copy of the notice that was received	within [2] days (not counting weekends and legal holidays) of receiving the notice	the petitioner	307(b)(4)
a support enforcement agency receives a written notice from the tribunal in which an order is being registered	the support enforcement agency	a copy of the notice that was received	within [2] days (not counting weekends and legal holidays) of receiving the notice	the petitioner	307(b)(4)
a support enforcement agency receives written communication from a respondent or respondent's attorney	the support enforcement agency	a copy of the communication that was received	within [2] days (not counting weekends and legal holidays) of receiving the notice	the petitioner	307(b)(5)

Appendix 2

Sample Trainer Guide

We modified this section of the Child Support Program Orientation trainer guide to demonstrate what you should include in your trainer guide.

Section 4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality Topic Outline39



DCSS Child Support Program Orientation Trainer Guide

Confidentiality Topic Outline

Required Trainer Materials



Tools & Equipment

- LCD (Liquid Crystal Display; also referred to as a projector)
- Computer
- Television
- VCR (Video Cassette Recorder)

Participant Supplies (some supplies may have already been provided)

- CSPO Participant Resource Guide
- Pens
- Note pads
- Post-Its
- Highlighters
- Name plates (Trainer discretion)
- White boards or easels and flip-charts
- Erasable markers

Handouts & Exercises

- Confidentiality PowerPoint Presentation
- Confidentiality Exercise

PowerPoint

- Confidentiality.ppt

Miscellaneous

- “Securing The Future” videotape (running time approximately 16 minutes)



Distribute PowerPoint Presentation Handout



Begin the Confidentiality PowerPoint (*Confidentiality.ppt*)



I. Introduction

A. Purpose – To discuss the importance of confidentiality in child support

B. Maintaining Confidentiality – Ask the following questions:

1. What do you believe confidentiality is?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion
2. How does confidentiality relate to your job?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion
3. What information needs to be kept confidential?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion
4. What steps do you take to ensure that confidential information is released to authorized persons for authorized reasons?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion
5. Are there risks or repercussions in releasing confidential information?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion
6. What do you think those risks/repercussions are?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion



Transition Sample:

Let's take a look at what the California Regulations say about confidentiality...

II. Confidentiality



- A. Refer participants to “Confidentiality and Record Keeping” on page 25 of the Participant Resource Guide
- B. Section 111420 Record Maintenance
 - 1. This section discusses all of the different pieces of information that we need to keep in our records
 - 2. Examples are the application for services and any actions taken on the case

Participant Resource Guide Information



Section 111420. Record Maintenance.

Each local child support agency shall maintain records necessary for the administration of the Title IV-D program, and the date of each, including all of the following:

- (a) Applications for child support services.
- (b) Actions to locate noncustodial parents, to establish paternity and to obtain, modify and enforce support orders, including medical support. This includes any relevant facts and actions taken by the local child support agency and the results of such action
- (c) The amounts and sources of support collections and the distribution of these collections.
- (d) Any fees charged or paid for support enforcement services, or any other administrative costs.
- (e) Any statistical, fiscal, and other records necessary for the reporting and accountability pursuant to 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 302.15(a)(7)
- (f) All records pertaining to complaint resolution specified in Chapter 10.
- (g) Any other information and documents not required by subsections (a) through (f) pertaining to the case.

Note

Authority cited: Sections 17306, 17310 and 17312, Family Code. Reference: 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Sections 302.15 and 303.2

Child Support Program Orientation (CSPO) Trainer Guide



C. Section 111430 Safeguarding and Confidentiality of Child and Spousal Support Information

1. It describes what information is considered confidential
2. Ask participants to read section (a). This can be done as a group or individually.

Participant Resource Guide Information



Section 111430. Safeguarding and Confidentiality of Child and Spousal Support Information.

(a) Child and spousal support information used in the administration of the Title IV-D Program shall be considered confidential and shall not be disclosed for any purpose not directly connected with the administration of the child and spousal support enforcement program, unless expressly authorized under this Article. For the purposes of this Article, information means all files, applications, papers, documents, and records including those maintained in an electronic format, on microfilm or microfiche.

(b) Information considered confidential under this Article consists of:

(1) Child and spousal support enforcement records related to:

(A) Determination of paternity

(B) Establishment, modification, and/or enforcement of child support and medical support orders.

(C) Establishment, modification, and/or enforcement of spousal support orders.

(2) Information related to abducted children or the location of the concealing, detaining, or abducting person.

(3) Information related to crimes against a child.

(c) All records and information obtained from other sources such as the Federal Parent Locator Service, Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Justice and private financial institutions shall be safeguarded in accordance with the requirements set forth by those sources.

Note

Authority cited: Sections 17306, 17310 and 17312, Family Code. Reference: Section 17212, Family Code; Section 11478.1, Welfare and Institutions Code; and 45 United States Code, Section 654 (26).



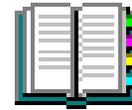
D. Section 111440 Disclosure of Information

1. It lists circumstances in which we may disclose information to specific agencies
2. For special agencies refer to CCR Section 111440



Trainer Note: Section 11140 includes a reference to Title IV-B of the Social Security Act. Title IV-B addresses child welfare at:

<http://www.ssa.gov/>.



Participant Resource Guide Information

Section 111440. Disclosure of Information.

- (a) Disclosure of information specified in Section 111430 is authorized as follows:
- (1) Information may be disclosed to public agencies for administrative, civil, or criminal investigations, actions, proceedings, or prosecutions directly related to the administration of the Title IV-D program, and other entities as permitted by state or federal law.
 - (2) Information may be disclosed to the local agency responsible for the administration of the Title IV-D program in another state.
 - (3) Information may be disclosed to the local agency responsible for the following program funded under the federal Social Security Act:
 - (A) Title IV-A
 - (B) Title IV-B
 - (C) Title IV-E
 - (4) A document requested by the person who wrote, prepared, or furnished the document may be disclosed to that person or his/her designee, if the designee has written authorization.
 - (5) A payment history of an obligor pursuant to a support order may be disclosed to the obligor, court, or person on whose behalf enforcement actions are being taken or to his/her designee, if that designee has written authorization.



Participant Resource Guide Information

Section 111440. Disclosure of Information. (Continued)

(6) Income and expense information of either parent may be disclosed to the other parent or custodial party for the purpose of establishing or modifying a child support order.

(7) Medical insurance information for a child may be disclosed to the other parent or person having custody of the child for the purpose of establishing, modifying, or enforcing a medical support order.

(8) Any information required to be disclosed by a court order may be disclosed to the person designated in the court order.

(9) Public records subject to disclosure under the Public Records Act may be disclosed.

(10) Information may be disclosed to the courts for Title IV-D related activities.

(11) Information may be disclosed to a district attorney, law enforcement agency, state or county child protective agency, or for sue in any judicial proceeding, to the extent permitted by federal and state law and regulation, for the following purposes:

(A) In aiding or assisting in the investigation or prosecution of cases involving child abduction.

(B) The prosecution of a crime against a child.

(C) For the protection of a child.

(12) Information may be disclosed to individuals who are authorized access to information from the Federal Parent Locator Service.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision in these regulations, the disclosure of information on the whereabouts of one party or the child to the other party shall be prohibited in any of the following circumstances:

(1) The local child support agency has reason to believe that release of the information may result in physical or emotional harm to the party of the child; or

(2) A good cause claim, pursuant to section 11477.04 or Section 14008-6, Welfare and Institutions Code, has been approved or is pending; or

(3) A protective order has been issued by a courts or administrative agency

Note

Authority cited: Sections 17306, 17310 and 17312, Family Code. Reference: Sections 3752(c) and 17212, Family Code; and Sections 11477.04, 11478.1, and 14007.6, Welfare and Institutions Code.



E. Section 111450 Record Retention

1. This section discusses the length of time we must retain records after the case is closed
2. It provides circumstances in which we may be required to keep information longer

Participant Resource Guide Information



Section 111450. Record Retention.

All closed Title IV-D case records shall be retained for four years and four months from the date of case closure, except case records that are the subject of any of the following, which shall be retained until the closure of:

- (a) An open federal or State audit
- (b) A pending civil litigation, or a court order requiring such records be maintained for an extended period.

Note

Authority cited: Sections 17306, 17310 and 17312, Family Code.
Reference: 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Sections 302.15 and 303.11(d).



F. Section 111460 Record Disposal

1. This section discusses acceptable ways in which we may dispose of confidential information
2. It addresses both paper and electronic records

Participant Resource Guide Information



Section 111460. Record Disposal.

(a) Each local child support agency shall ensure that the records maintained pursuant to Section 111420 are disposed of as specified below.

(b) Confidential records shall be destroyed in one of the following manners:

- (1) Shredding.
- (2) Recycling which results in destruction of the records.
- (3) Burning.
- (4) Erasure.
- (5) Obliteration.
- (6) Burial.

(7) Permanently deleting, erasing, and/or purging electronic, microfilm, and microfiche records from computers, hard-drives, floppy disks, magnetic media, and other software programs. Electronic documents that have been printed or reproduced into a hard copy shall be destroyed as specified in subparagraphs (1) through (6) above.

(c) Records destroyed as specified in subsection (b)(6), shall be obliterated in a manner that ensures the information contained in these records is indecipherable prior to burial

(d) Records containing criminal history information not related to the parent's failure to provide support, shall be destroyed as specified in subsection (b) within four years and four months of the date the case was closed.

(e) If the records specified in this Article are destroyed by a third party, a local child support agency shall include a confidentiality clause in the contract with the third party to ensure record confidentiality through destruction.

Note

Authority cited: Sections 17306, 17310 and 17312, Family Code. Reference: Section 17531, Family Code.



G. Introduce and play “Securing The Future” video

H. Discuss the “Securing The Future” video

1. What are your thoughts on the video?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion
2. What would you say if you were in that situation where the co-worker was researching high school classmates?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion
3. Do you feel your perspective has changed since seeing the video?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion
4. If so, how?
 - a) Allow participants to respond
 - b) Facilitate discussion



III. **Exercise**

A. Distribute Confidentiality exercise

1. Announce time limit of 5 minutes
2. Call time after 5 minutes

B. Review answers to exercise to discuss the importance of confidentiality

C. Collect exercises

IV. **Closing**

A. Ask participants if they have any questions and provide responses

B. Thank participants for their participation



Transition Sample:

These regulations, as well as other useful information, are available on the State of California DCSS Internet website. Let's turn to the next section, "State of California DCSS Internet".

Appendix 3

Sample List of Contributors

Appendix 3

List of Contributors

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